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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: CODEL BAUCUS MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER MALIKI ON
SEPTEMBER 16

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a September 16 meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, the members of Codel Baucus delivered a tough message to PM Maliki, underscoring the frustration in Congress with the slow progress on political reconciliation and the need for Maliki personally to do more. The PM defended his government's record and emphasized that reconciliation is also an Iraqi goal. End summary.

12. (C) Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Ben Nelson (D-NE), and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) met on September 16 with Prime Minister Maliki. Underscoring the frustration felt both in Congress and by their constituents with the slow pace of political progress in Iraq, Senator Baucus told Maliki that he needs to do still more to promote reconciliation. "There's a frustration in Congress that you haven't done as much as Congress feels you should," said Sen. Baucus.

13. (C) Maliki thanked the Senator for his frankness and said that he would be equally candid: He had heard lots of statements coming out of Congress in recent days; he agreed with some but not all of them. "Look at U.S. history -- how long did it take to clean out the gangs of Chicago, or to finish (post Civil War) reconstruction?" asked Maliki, who stressed the need for "strategic patience."

14. (C) Senator Baucus agreed that reconciliation takes time, but noted that in light of the recent reports released in Washington, the American people wanted to see more concrete action on reconciliation in Iraq, and to see it quickly. "There are some who feel that we may have to force that result by withholding money or withdrawing troops," said the Senator.

15. (C) Changing tack, Maliki said that national reconciliation was an Iraqi demand as well. "National reconciliation is the only path for us, not the use of force. The Coalition Forces tried that and failed, but we were able to achieve something when we switched to national reconciliation," said Maliki, before quickly adding for good measure that the benchmarks were "all Iraqi demands." Maliki credited his government with pulling Iraq back from the brink of civil war, and noted the GOI's progress in absorbing Sunni tribesmen and former insurgents into the security services. "There can be no national reconciliation without security, and we are building our forces so that we will be able to operate without foreign forces. Whatever decision Congress takes, the Iraqi Security Forces will have to take responsibility for Iraq's security because it's our country," said Maliki.

16. (C) In response to a proposal from Senator Nelson to free up U.S. forces in Baghdad for operations elsewhere in Iraq, Maliki said his government was standing up new units to

confront AQI and that he would discuss possible strategies with General Petraeus upon his return. However, the PM continued, national reconciliation will remain the core of the GOI's strategy. In response to a question from Senator Snowe about the prospects for passage of benchmark legislation in the short term, Maliki noted that a new de-Ba'athification reform bill was on its way to the Council of Representatives. He also stressed that even in the absence of enacted legislation, the GOI has pushed forward on de-Ba'athification reform. "Twenty-five percent of the employees in our ministries are former Ba'athists," claimed Maliki. The Prime Minister reacted testily to the suggestion that Maliki had not taken advantage of the surge to achieve results on political reconciliation. Feigning astonishment, Maliki turned to the translator and demanded: "Are you translating this accurately?" Maliki then recounted how he had recently received a former Sunni insurgent leader who confessed to kidnapping 55 Shi'ites, a tribal sheikh who at one time was linked to AQI, and a former insurgent who had killed 43 Iraqis. "I welcomed each of them on the condition that they would henceforth support the government. This is national reconciliation," said Maliki.

¶7. (C) Maliki cautioned his guests that there were still some Sunnis who were intent on restoring the former regime. "We will never permit the return of the old system," said Maliki. He expressed little sympathy for those Sunnis who claimed that the 2005 elections were "illegal," saying that he would not allow anyone to turn the clock back on democracy. "National reconciliation does not mean turning Iraq over to those who want to take it back to dictatorship," said a somewhat heated Maliki.

¶8. (C) Maliki responded thoughtfully when asked by Senator Salazar whether having fewer U.S. troops on the ground would

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help the Iraqis in their quest for national reconciliation. Calling it a good question, Maliki agreed that in areas such as Basrah, the departure of foreign troops had contributed to stability. He predicted that there would be a large reduction of Coalition Forces in coming days, but stressed that an immediate departure of U.S. forces would generate a crisis. He further predicted that Congress would see significant progress in the readiness of Iraqi forces over the next six months.

¶9. (C) In response to a question from Senator Baucus, Maliki explained at some length the challenges involved in trying to replicate the Anbar experience in other parts of Iraq. He pointed with pride to the GOI's plans to establish tribal councils all over Iraq to turn Iraq's tribes into the eyes and ears of the Iraqi security forces in the fight against extremists. With regard to Iran, Maliki stressed that all Iraqis, regardless of sect, are united in their determination not to live under Iranian domination. "Our relations must be based on respect, without Iranian intervention in our internal affairs," he said. By the same token, Maliki continued, Iraq needed to clean up some of the problems it inherited from the Saddam era, including a number of terrorist groups that sought to launch attacks against Turkey and Iran from Iraqi soil. Asked what he would tell the U.S. public if he were addressing them on national television, Maliki boiled his message down to one word: "Patience."

¶10. Comment: The Codel's message -- that Congress and the American public are frustrated and Maliki has to deliver more -- clearly registered with the Iraqi Prime Minister, who nevertheless defended his government's record. Maliki's mood was probably not helped by the fact that the meeting with the Codel began late, ran later than expected, and was delaying the breaking of his Ramadan fast.

¶11. (U) Codel Baucus did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before leaving Iraq.
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